HealthyActions
Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living

Healthy Portions:
How to Read Food Labels

Eating healthy doesn't just mean eating healthy foods. It also means **how much** food you eat – even if the food is good for you. Eating portions, or amounts, that are too big can cause you to gain weight. Eating too much is easy to do.

When you limit the amount of food you eat, it is called "portion control." Portion control can help you lose weight if you need to. It can also help you stay at a healthy weight.[1]

Many food plans talk about "servings" and "serving sizes." A serving size is a set amount of food. It might be measured in cups, pieces, or ounces.[1] You may choose to eat more or less than the serving size. Knowing what a serving size is helps you keep track of how many calories and nutrients you eat each day. Food labels list serving sizes. Reading food labels can help you choose healthy portions.

For example, let's say you are reading this food label:

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

Amount Per Serving

Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 1.5g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	

Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

This label tells you the serving size is one cup or 250 calories. It also tells you the container has two servings. If you eat the whole container of food, you get two servings. That's 500 calories. Be sure to check for number of servings. It also means you are getting twice the fat, sugars, and other items listed on the label.

The American Heart Association has listed the number of servings of each food group you should eat each day.[2] If a food doesn't have a label, use the serving sizes given on the next page as a guide. If you have a food label, use that information. It will be more exact. The number of servings you should eat depends on how many calories you eat a day. **Your doctor will tell you the right amount of calories and servings per day for your health goals.**

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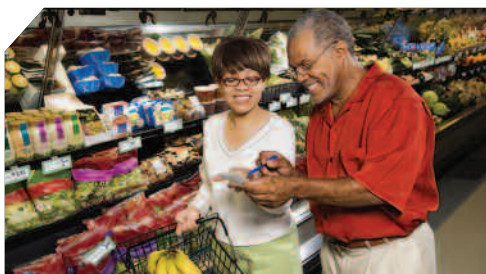
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The number of servings of each food group is different for everyone. Talk to your doctor about the right number of calories and servings per day for your health goals.

Food Group and Servings	Serving Size Examples
Grains. 6-8 servings/day.	1 slice bread. 1 oz dry cereal. 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal.
Vegetables. 3-5 servings/day.	1 cup raw leafy vegetables. 1/2 cup cut-up raw or cooked vegetables.
Fruits. 4-5 servings/day.	1 medium fruit (about the size of a baseball). 1/4 cup dried fruit. 1/2 cup fresh or canned fruit.
Fat-free or low-fat dairy foods. 2-3 servings/day.	1 cup fat-free or low-fat milk. 1 cup fat-free or low-fat yogurt. 1-1/2 oz fat-free or low-fat cheese.
Lean meats, poultry, seafood. 3-6 oz a day.	3 oz cooked meat is about the size of a deck of cards. 3 oz grilled fish is about the size of a checkbook.
Fats and oils. 2-3 servings/day.	1 Tbsp mayonnaise or regular salad dressing. 1 tsp vegetable oil. 2 Tbsp low-fat salad dressing.
Nuts, seeds, and legumes. 3-5 servings/week.	1/3 cup or 1-1/2 oz nuts. 2 Tbsp peanut butter. 2 Tbsp or 1/2 ounce seeds. 1/2 cup dry beans or peas.
Sweets and added sugars. 0-5 servings/week.	1 Tbsp sugar. 1 Tbsp jelly or jam. 1/2 cup sorbet. 1 cup lemonade.

Sources
1. MayoClinic.com "Lose Weight with Proper Portion Control.
   http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/portion-control/WT00017
2. American Heart Association. Eat a Wide Variety of Foods.
   http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3040356

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